

All,

I wanted to let everyone know that the Department is working on draft legislation concerning water distribution and enforcement. We have been and are planning to share that draft with interested parties to solicit their feedback.

The draft bill is intended to set up a pilot project in the Tongue River Basin that could possibly allow an administrative petition process. The draft will also attempt to modernize the water commissioner and water distribution and enforcement statutes so it might be a good place to focus the discussions of this group. The idea behind a pilot project based in the Tongue River is that Montana must administer the basin jointly with Wyoming under the Yellowstone River Compact. As a result, a pilot project there provides an opportunity to see how revisions to the statutes work in a single basin before making changes that apply statewide.

I propose that we share the draft with this group as well as other stakeholders to solicit feedback. We would make revisions based on that feedback and then set up a time to walk through the draft before finalizing it for WPIC. I will shoot to have a draft out before the next WPIC meeting. WPIC has requested that I talk about the idea behind the draft legislation at the next meeting, but I am not intending to have a draft ready to share with WPIC until their May or July meetings when draft legislation is typically introduced. That should give us time to work with all of you and others to make sure that you are comfortable with the draft and the direction it is going in.

Please let me know if you have any questions or suggestions at this point.

Thanks,

Tim